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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000258

SIPDIS

PARIS FOR ZEYA; LONDON FOR GOLDRICH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [LE](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: OMAN CONDEMNS HARIRI ASSASSINATION

Classified By: Ambassador Richard L. Baltimore III.  
Reason: 1.4 (b, d).

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Summary  
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1. (SBU) The Foreign Ministry quickly issued a statement on February 14 that condemned the murder of former Lebanese PM Rafiq Hariri, mourned his loss and expressed confidence that the crime would not undermine Lebanon's stability. MFA contacts were loath to point fingers of blame, but expressed great concern that Lebanon not be allowed to descend again into civil war. One official privately speculated that Lebanon will be increasingly intolerant of Syrian interference in its domestic affairs as a result. Press coverage was generally straight, but some limited traffic on a popular Internet message board suggested an U.S. or Israeli hand in Hariri's murder. End summary.

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MFA Quick to Condemn  
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2. (U) Oman's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement to the Oman News Agency (ONA) on the evening of February 14 that condemned the assassination by car bomb of former Lebanese PM Rafiq Hariri in Beirut. The text of the ONA report is as follows:

(Begin text:)

The Government of the Sultanate of Oman has strongly condemned the terrorist act of assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri.

A statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that this crime, no matter how heinous, would not affect the stability and prosperity enjoyed by the brotherly state of Lebanon.

"The martyrdom of Al Hariri is a huge loss, not only at the Lebanese level, but also at the level of the Arab region and the world at large," said the statement.

The Omani government is expressing its condolences and sympathies to the Lebanese Government in general and the family of Al Hariri in particular, continued the statement, which also voiced prayers for the soul of Al Hariri and the other victims.

(End text.)

The MFA is selective in choosing which international events to hail or condemn, as the case may be, so it is telling that they moved so quickly to issue a statement in this case. The Ministry's usual practice is not to divulge the actual text of its statement, leaving the ONA's version of the wording the only source from which to draw.

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Officials Not Pointing Fingers, But...  
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3. (C) MFA Under Secretary Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi expressed to DCM at a February 15 lunch his shock at Hariri's murder, but would not entertain speculation at this point as to who may have been responsible. He hoped the murder would not ignite a string of tit-for-tat killings that might spark wider sectarian violence. MFA International Organizations Director Ambassador Talib Miran al-Raisi offered his private views in a February 15 meeting with Pol/Econ Chief. Saying he had met Hariri on a few previous occasions, Ambassador Talib welcomed both the USG and MFA statements condemning his murder. He urged that the police investigation be allowed to take its course before blame is assigned. Confident that the murder will not plunge Lebanon back into civil war, Talib Miran did see this event as fueling Lebanese consensus that the time for permitting Syrian interference in its internal affairs is over. Hind Bahwan, a prominent businesswoman from one of the leading commercial families, told EconOff that she was staying only a block away from the site of Hariri's murder but fortunately had left Beirut to return to Muscat just a few hours before the bombing.

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Low-Key Public Reactions Point to U.S., Israel  
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14. (SBU) News of Hariri's murder made the headlines of all local Arabic and English-language dailies, though the MFA statement was issued after some of the papers had already gone to press. The government-owned Arabic daily "Oman" ran a lead editorial February 15 condemning Hariri's murder under the rubric "A Hideous Crime." The editorial hailed Hariri's role in rebuilding Lebanon, and urged that nation not to give in to conspiracies aimed at reigniting sectarian fighting.

15. (SBU) Omani public attention to the news has not been voluminous. There were only a couple dozen postings on a popular Internet message board in reference to Hariri's murder. All of the messages mourned his loss, hailed his good deeds for Lebanon and prayed for his soul. Some of the entries blamed the U.S. or "the Jews" for his murder, and others ruled out any Syrian hand in the crime. One contributed pointed to the Administration's condemnation of the assassination as proof that the "Black House" will target Syria as the next Arab state to attack.  
BALTIMORE